love me love me, say that you love me by beetleteetle

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Summary:

A bit of assumption never hurt anybody right?
Or people always had it the wrong way round with Mike and Will.

1. mama tells me i shouldn't bother

Joyce knew her son. She knew everything about him, even his breathing. Well she'd like to think she did. She wasn't always stable, especially after the events of 83' and 84', and often Will told her she's too overprotective. But she'd like to think she's just cautious.

After Jonathan left for college, she decided she'd try to let Will have some space. After all, he's in high school now. She had to admit his freshman year involved a lot of 'checking on', as she didn't want a repeat of the previous years. Will still had episodes from time to time, but Joyce had learned with Hopper how to help him through them. With the gates closed, he told her they appeared more like nightmares than the 'now-memories' the Mind Flayer infiltrated his head with. Will had been jumpy since 83', but his worry had started to decline.

So it was one of the last days before his Christmas break, and Joyce could tell something was off.

Jonathan had arrived home for the holidays, returning from NYU. Joyce was overjoyed to see her eldest. But Will was even quieter than usual. It wasn't like he was hibernating, more like he was hiding. So she tried to let him be, checking up on the boy from time to time, but he insisted he was fine.

Joyce wasn't really surprised that Boxing Day, the news she'd received she had anticipated for a while. Her son sobbing in her arms while she tried to comfort him wasn't a great experience, but she knew it was going to happen at some point. She was just glad Lonnie wasn't there, as Will had just told her he was gay. She had nothing against gay people, unlike her ex, and always thought Will may have been gay. But when Lonnie was around, he'd forced the idea into Will that being gay was wrong, and Joyce hated how much it had affected her son. So with the words 'I still love you', they hugged.

The rest of the holidays was a blur, with Jonathan returning to New York, and Will coming out of his shell, for what felt like the first time in years. The Byers household was truly peaceful.

Mike visited a lot over the holidays, which Joyce didn't mind at all. Mike and her son's other friends were like her own children, and she relied on them to look after Will when she wasn't around. So it wasn't a shock that Mike was around a lot, he had been since the events of 84'. One thing hadn't changed since the day the two boys met, they were the closest people you would have known. They knew each other inside out. Joyce wondered if Will had told Mike he liked boys, although Mike probably already knew. She was just glad her son was happy again.

2. dear i fear we're facing a problem

Hopper liked to think he was an honest man. Well mostly honest. Well honest apart from when he couldn't be for safety reasons. But when his adopted daughter, Jane Hopper, who's now a sophomore in high school despite her being abused for most of her life, asked if she could like girls, he honestly didn't know what to say. Hawkins wasn't a very open minded place, Joyce's ex Lonnie proved that so, so when his daughter asked him about it, he knew he had to tread carefully. He believed it was ok, but if Jane went around talking about her liking girls she'd be put in more danger than she already is. So he told her that:
"Well you can, but not many people like it. Girls who like girls and boys who like boys aren't always accepted by everyone. I don't mind if you like a girl but be careful about how you go about it, I don't want you getting hurt." Honesty had to always be the best policy.

And with that, Jane walked off to her room, probably to watch her new television Hopper had saved up for. She had once asked him if the people in the movies had powers too, he told her they didn't and she watched their current film with curiosity, appearing to be trying to figure out how they had done the low-quality special effects. His daughter had loved movies and TV shows, they'd kept her mostly from boredom when he was at work. This was only encouraged when her somewhat geeky friends introduced her to a world of film. The first time she entered a cinema was in late 1985. She wore a disguise into and out of the building, and her and the rest of the 'party', as they liked to be called (Hopper had learned it was to do with their game, Dungeons and Dragons, but still didn't get it), watched Back To The Future. Jane was enamoured with the concept of time travel, but also loved to make jokes about how Will dressed like the main character, Marty McFly.

Hopper loved having Jane as his daughter, but god he missed Sara. His biological daughter really made his life so much better. But he couldn't save her. Sometimes he looks up at the sky, wondering if she's in space, the place she loved learning about. Jim still had some old books about space, he thinks if she were still here she'd grow to become an astronaut. But now he has Jane. She could be very

emotional at times, but he couldn't blame her. He wasn't allowed to let her out of the small house in the forest until mid-summer in 1985, after some bargaining with Dr. Owens. He was glad she was safe though, as he still didn't believe Brenner was dead.

When Joyce called the same day as Jane questioning him, he thought there may have been connection. Will had told Joyce he was gay, and presumably Jane watched it using her powers. It didn't matter that much, but clearly Jane was wondering if she could like girls. Whatever happens, Hopper was going to make sure she's safe.

3. i have desperately pondered

Dustin didn't feel extremely close to any one party member if he were being honest, Mike and Lucas were neighbours, but Mike and Will were best friends. Max was close to Lucas, despite them being exes, and El and Max had gotten over their feud and grown closer than most friendships he'd seen. Mike and El remained extremely close despite them breaking up because El didn't know who she was, let alone who she loved. Dustin almost felt like an outsider, but equally close to them all. So it was a surprise when Will's voice came through the speaker in the middle of one winter's night, asking to come over to talk about something important. No later than 15 minutes later, Will appeared outside Dustin's front door. He had a comic in his hand and a nervous look on his face.
"So first of all, here's your X-Men 134 from that time in 83', I never returned it." Will stated, handing Dustin the comic they had raced for so many years ago.
"Uh, thanks? Is that why you're here?"
"No, there's something else too, but can I come in? It's cold."
"Oh yeah! Do you want to go in the living room?"
"Yeah, sure."
They both sat down on the sofa, and Will began the conversation.
"So I haven't told anyone apart from my Mom this, so please don't hate me forever."
"Okay.... What is it? I'm sure I won't hate you."
"Well... Uh..." Will's hand visibly began to shake. "I'm gay."
"What dickhead would hate you for that? It doesn't make any difference whatsoever."
"It doesn't?"
"Of course it doesn't. You've been through some tough shit and this is nothing compared to that. You're always going to be Will The Wise."
A smile spread across Will's face.
"Also, I don't really care about the X-Men 134."
"Well I felt bad about cheating and starting early so I brought it back. Plus it makes a great conversation starter."
Something about Will seemed a lot lighter, like he'd been carrying some heavy books for years.
"You can always talk about anything to me you know? You're one of my best friends"

"I know, same here. Also, sorry about waking you up."
"It's ok, I was actually already awake. Anyway, when did you know?"
"I don't know when I really knew? I just admitted it to myself when I was in the Upside Down. I thought, well I'm going to die anyway, best not to die lying to myself. So I kinda shouted, well said aloud, that I was gay. I would have shouted, had it not have been freezing and a Demogorgon chasing me."
"So you told a Demogorgon before us? Are we not trustworthy?" Dustin joked.
"Sorry! I was in immediate danger! Wait is that the time? I need to go, but thank you so much for listening to me. I don't know what I would have done."
"It's ok, really, you should probably go before your Mom wakes up and has a meltdown."

And with that, Will left. Dustin knew Will wouldn't wan't him to tell anyone else, so he kept it to himself. He always thought Will may have been gay, and he thought it was stupid that Lonnie gave him shit for it. What confused Dustin was that Will came to him first, before the rest of the party. Especially Mike. Dustin always thought Will may have liked Mike, they were closer than anything he'd ever seen in his old elementary. Will appeared to look at Mike like he was everything amazing in the world, but that was his view. Who knew?

Dustin never really knew why Max and Lucas broke up. It was just before the start of Christmas break. Dustin had mostly gotten over his feelings for the redhead, so when Lucas told him of the pair's splitting, he didn't know what to think of it. But they were actually closer than ever, which was the most puzzling part. Dustin never asked about it though, as he didn't know what happened when they split. And he would rather not open that can of worms.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I'm really glad you guys are enjoying this story! Please comment your opinions on it! It's my first fic, so I will do something more creative for my next one. Forewarning: I won't have chapters for Billy, Nancy or any of the other parents (apart from Dad Steve of course). Thanks for reading!

4. reason will not lead to solution

Lucas knew there would be significant times in your life, the ones you won't forget, but what he didn't expect would be his first breakup.

One snowy night, his then girlfriend, Max Mayfield, appeared outside his window. He didn't quite know what to make of the rock hitting his window at 1am. Her hair was covered in snow, and she looked like she'd been crying a lot that night. He immediately thought that her step dad or brother had hurt her, but let her into his room to find out.

"We need to talk."

Those fateful words entered Lucas' ear, and he could only fear what was coming. He encouraged her to continue talking, but she was hesitant.

"I'm a lesbian."

Of anything she could have said, he didn't quite expect that. He never really thought about that when running through the 36 possible different things she could have told him. He added that to his list.

"That's okay. So you don't like me like that?"

He could tell she was caught off guard by his casual response, and that's when he noticed the bruises.

"Uh.. yeah. You don't mind?"

"No, but what I do mind is those bruises. What happened?"

"I told Neil."

"I'm going to kill the son of a bitch." And in that moment, he truly meant it.

"Lucas you don't need to do that, we aren't even together."

"So? Your my friend and he hurt you!"

"It wouldn't be the first time."

"What?"

"He's done it before Lucas." Her voice was starting to crack. "He would hit me, push me, call me a d…" And that's when she burst into tears. He wrapped his arms around her, encasing her with a seal of safety. He knew this was more important than any breakup.

"You are worth so much more than what he makes you out to be." He tried to reassure her. "Do you want to stay here tonight?"

He could feel her nodding in his chest, and they sat there for a while in comforting silence, her sobbing into him. He didn't know how long

they stayed like that, but he made sure she was cared for before helping her into his bed, and he got a blanket out for the floor.
Staring at the ceiling from the floor, he felt so mad, sad and sympathetic at the same time. Sure, he'd just had his first heartbreak, but he didn't quite know how to deal with helping Max through the abuse she was receiving.

For a while he mostly tried to shield her from it all, and tried to look out for bruises. He arranged for the other party members to hold sleepovers often, so she could be away from that house of horrors. Max had looked happier, not beaming, but enough to make Lucas happy too. They may not have been what he'd wanted, but her happiness was more important.

So it was definitely significant, and he knew this for sure. What else did he know? That there was more than meets the eye between Mike and Will.

He'd noticed the glances Mike would give Will, it was the same glances he used to give Max, and the same ones he picked up on from Max to El. He'd noticed the way Mike listened to Will like he knew every truth in the world, like he was an angel. Lucas knew there was something there, but it seemed unbalanced. Will would give Mike glances every once and a while, but they were rare and more to say what could have been, unlike the passionate, loving looks from the taller boy. So he wondered.

The party minus the two boys had always talked about how Will probably liked Mike, but nowadays he couldn't disagree more. He knew it was more likely the reverse.

But when it comes to unexpected crushes, Eleven topped them all. While he had noticed Max's longing stares, he'd noticed it wasn't unrequited. Eleven did the exact same thing. But more openly, probably as she hadn't had the idea that it was wrong drilled into her. Lucas wouldn't say he was jealous of his telekinetic friend, no, just wished he was her. Sorta. Well he wished Max felt the same way he did. But he knows she doesn't. So he just goes along with the pining from both the girls.

A typical day at school would go along the lines of this:

Lucas would arrive at around the same time as everyone else, apart from Will and Jane, they always arrive earlier. They'd meet by one of their lockers, talk about who knows what, Dustin would make a flirtatious joke to a random girl walking by, cue the longing stares from Max, El, and Mike. Will would be oblivious to Mike's though, and would ask him about his book he's writing. They'd all head to homeroom.

His variety of classes would leave him freaking out over the pile of homework he'd received, for him to complain about at lunch. Will starts drawing as per the routine. Dustin would start explaining this new concept he had learned in science to Eleven, and although she'd listen intently, she would no doubt get distracted by Max like normal, who'd be bickering with Mike over the daily issue.

It was their routine. He'd noticed it, and he believed Will had too. Lucas was bored of the routine, but he prefered it to Demogorgons, Brenners or Mind Flayers. Who wouldn't?

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey guys! I hoped you enjoyed this chapter, it was longer than the rest. I'm hoping to keep making the chapters longer, and better quality! So thanks for reading it!

5. you love me no longer, i know

Steve didn't think he was a bad guy. He knew he used to be a bit of an asshole, but he believes he has changed. His main reason? Dustin and his friends. When fighting the 'demodogs', as Dustin called them, he realised how much he'd grown attached to the little shitheads. Over the years, he'd seen them grow. He got a job in Hawkins, and made it his duty to keep them safe. He didn't know what drew him to protecting them, he just knew he had to. Dustin took a while to grow into the ladies man role Steve had had, but it was great seeing how much more confident Dustin had grown because of it. As far as he's aware, Dustin's dad isn't around for whatever reason. Steve thinks this is why he cares so much about him.

It's no use asking Dustin for information on the other 'party' members however, so he talks to Lucas, Max or Will about it. He often feels so bad for Will, the kid had been put through so much shit, and it was the same when he was younger too. It made Steve angry, but he knew Joyce could be strong when needing to protect her sons. It was obvious to anyone how much she'd do for them, be it going to a whole other dimension to save them, or talking to them through lights. But even though Will had gone through so much shit, Steve knew he didn't realise how much people cared for him. Take Nancy's brother, Mike for example. Steve had known from the start Mike cared about Will deeply, but only later did he realise he probably had feelings for him. Steve couldn't tell how long he'd liked him, but he knew it was longer than he'd personally known them. Will on the other hand, relied on Mike in a different way, a comfort, someone he could tell stuff to.

Steve cared about those kids, a lot. One night while babysitting them, Max asked if they could talk in private. He didn't really spend much one-on-one time with her, that was mostly Dustin, so he was happy to spend some time with her. She was like a little sister to him.
"What would you do if you couldn't tell anyone about this really important thing?" She asked him in his kitchen.
"What do you mean? Do I have to beat up some demodogs?"
"No, as in you have this secret, but you could be hated for it."
"Just tell me what it is, I won't care."

She looked to the floor, as if she was weighing the pros and cons of the situation. Suddenly, in a hushed voice, she told him she's a lesbian.
"Whoever hates you for that is an asshole, alright? You can't help the way you feel."
"Uh… thanks Steve." She appeared a bit shocked at his sudden outburst.
"Have you told anyone else?"
"Just Lucas. He didn't care, well he said he didn't."
"Okay, are you planning on telling anyone else?"
"Probably not."
"Okay. It's okay to not want to tell people about it. Do you like anyone?"
"I think so, but she'd never like me." The she was very quiet. Max seemed very worried about people finding out.
"Well maybe when the day that all these ignorant assholes wake up and let you be, you'll find someone who does like you back." He tried to comfort her.
"Yeah, it just feels like that day will never come."

And after that, he observed the brief but caring looks she'd send Jane, the girl with powers Mike used to be obsessed with. She was taken by the brunette, and looked at her like she was some great KFC. And from what Steve could tell, Jane was just as smitten. When they'd first met each other, there appeared to have been some hostility, for some unknown reason. But they'd appeared to have gotten over it. Like he was over Nancy.

Well Steve wasn't completely over the eldest Wheeler. He was still so annoyed at how much of a crap boyfriend he was. But Jonathan cared for her a lot, so he was happy. They'd both gone off to fancy colleges, but were home for the holidays. They met as soon as they got into town. Steve was mostly relieved he'd have people his age to hang out with.
They met in a diner, Nancy and Jonathan appearing tired from their travels.
"God I've missed you two."
Steve pulled them into an embrace with the intention of never letting go. The trio talked about their post-high school experiences, the teenagers, and how they've all needed a break from life. Unbeknown

to the two college-goers, Steve had written a ‘Kid log’ out of boredom, and presented it to the pair.
“Since I’ve been spending so much time with your siblings, and I know you guys have missed them a ton since you left last summer, I made something to keep you updated on them. I knew Nancy would like the writing, and Jonathan, well I tried to take some pictures but they turned out quite shitty.”
The book itself seemed pretty well made in Steve’s eyes, and he thought it’d be the best way to fill time in between shifts at the family business. He didn’t really spend that much time with his family, so the teens were the closest thing he had to one.
“This is amazing Steve!” Nancy beamed, holding it between her and Jonathan.
“Yeah, these are some extraordinary shots, and look, you even got Mike to smile!” Jonathan praised. Their joy at the book made him feel like he’d done something nice for once in his life. The three spent the rest of the reunion joking, reading their favourite parts from the book, and talking about the future. Steve truly felt joy with them. They were his best friends.

That Christmas was one of his favourites. He felt like he had made something nice with that book, he got to spend time with all his favourite people, he even gave to charity. He did see Tommy H and Carol, but ignored them. He was excited for the new year. Writing resolutions wasn’t usually his thing, but he wanted to do something with his life, seeing how well it’d gone for Nancy and Jonathan, despite them only being college freshman. They’d accomplished so much already and he could only want the same. Steve didn’t think he was a bad guy, but he wanted to get better.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Woo it's a Steve chapter! Also I've decided that I'm going to not do what I originally planned for next chapter because it won't really be very helpful to the plot and I don't really like what I had planned for it! So this fanfic will only be 9 chapters long but it's about to get good! Thanks for all your support, I'm glad you guys are enjoying this as it's my first fanfic.

6. i will end up lost in confusion

Eleven has learned a lot. In the lab she wasn't taught much, just to listen to Papa. She hated the mouth breather. She was so alone as a child. Forced to do horrifying acts, and if she disobeyed she would be hit. The world was grey. No colours, no fun, no love. A lake of darkness, drowning her.

When she first left the lab, she learned what promises were. Mike taught her that. Something you can't break. And she learned friends don't lie. Eleven needed that stability, promises were her anchor. It was her first time outside of the lab, and she tried taking in everything. The world was fascinating.

When she spent that first year with Hopper, she'd learned so much more. Words- from the dusty dictionary Hopper had loaned from the library, music- Hopper loved playing records, and El loved it too. She also learned plots of what seemed like a thousand soaps. TV fascinated her. It captivated her. Hopper also attempted to teach her to read, semi successfully. It took her around 6 months, but after she'd got the hang of it, she delved into the world of books. Her speech was still broken, but she had learned all about science, literature, math (although she didn't always understand it, she tried), history, and the world outside of Hawkins.

When she left to see Mama and eventually Kali, she learned all about her past and family, and how much she truly cared about Hopper and her friends. She also learned she was a fan of pop punk music, but that wasn't as important. She did learn how to channel her emotions into her powers, and eventually used that knowledge to finally close the gate.

After the Snowball, she had a lot of thoughts. Mostly that she didn't really know who she was. And that although kissing Mike was nice, she didn't know exactly what it meant to Mike. El had realised she didn't like Mike as anything more than a friend. A best friend, but nothing more. And she didn't know how to tell Mike this. So she watched some soaps and read some books to figure it out. Hopper tried encouraging her to catch up on learning, so she'd be able to go to school with her friends some time in high school, and she did try,

but she also spent a lot of time figuring out what to say to Mike. She learned how to write, and not only wrote out answers to math questions, but what she'd say to him. Writing was easier than speaking for her, and she found it easier to get the words out when they were already planned out.

So that June, Mike came over, on his own as she'd requested, and she told him.
"Mike. I don't think we should keep being more than friends because I want you to just be my friend. I still want to hug you and spend a lot of time with you, just not as people who go to the Snowball together. Also, I don't really know who I am yet and I really want to be able to figure that out. Sorry. Please don't leave me."
"I'm not going to leave you El. Not now, not ever. And maybe I was a bit too excited a girl hung out with me. I understand." He responded.
She was happy he wasn't mad, and they hugged. Damn she loved hugs. They were better than slaps.

The first time she was able to attend one of the party's sleepovers was later that summer, in August. She was introduced to the Wheeler parents as a friend Mike met at a park, and they didn't mind her. There were a few dirty looks from Ted, but she didn't care. And she found out Max was actually really kind and definitely bitchin'. She decided to not hate her. And so their friendship began. She also met Will in person for the first time, and it was obvious they'd get on well. And it was also obvious to anyone their parents appeared to get on more than well. El had noticed the 'flirting' (Dustin taught her this word, she wasn't convinced it was actually a word- she'd never heard it before). At the party's sleepover they played games, watched films, and argued over which characters would win in a fight. It was very amusing.

Over time, she grew to like Max. A lot. She taught her how to skateboard and helped her beat Dustin in Dig Dug. Max appeared to enjoy coming over to El's cabin, so it became routine, only exception being whole party sleepovers. Their sleepovers were filled with movies, climbing trees outside, and wrestling. El was usually first asleep, and Max was usually first awake. El saw Max gazing out of the cabin window one night, the light of the stars making her eyes glimmer. In that moment, she knew something else. Max was

dazzling. And she didn't know what to make of that.

If El wasn't spending time with Max, she could usually be found with Will. She'd read a book, he'd draw her. This day was different however. Looking nervous, Will requested if he could talk to her about something. That something being, she later found out, that he liked boys. At first she was confused. Could you even like the same gender? The truth came as quick as the snow outside. In return, she inquired if she could like girls. She approached Hopper about it, and he told her she could, but that most people don't like that. That's all she needed to know. She could only like girls if she didn't tell anyone she didn't trust.

Christmas was astonishing. Decorations adorned all of her friends houses, she was in awe everywhere she went. The Wheelers did the most, after all, they had the most money. El didn't like money, it gave people unfair advantages. But she liked it when it meant she could see her friends houses like this. Hopper also let her visit her Mama, that house wasn't as decorated but she was happy to see Mama. Hopper also gave her a present. Unwrapping the paper covering it, she identified a book. It was an en-cy-clo-ped-ia. He told her it was a book of knowledge, and it wasn't just about words. She was overjoyed at her new book, but it was quite heavy, so he helped her put it on her new desk. Opening it, she saw not only words but pictures! So many pictures! Bursting with excitement, she pulled her adoptive father into a hug, and thanked him. She couldn't wait to learn all of these new things.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hi everyone! Sorry for not updating in a while I've been very busy! But here's El's chapter, the last three will be mostly events, the very last taking place straight after the penultimate possibly (undecided). Also, I tried showing what lead up to chapter two sort of? Well anyway I hope you enjoy this one!

7. i can't care bout anything but you

Max experienced a lot of hate towards her. Mostly by Neil, as he hated her with every piece of his being. She couldn't talk about it though, no. She had to remain Mad Max, and shut everyone out. Plus, she'd gotten used to it. It wasn't new that most people hated her. Her dad didn't. She missed him so much. But she had music to get her through. She would listen to her Walkman while skating, which she did a lot. Travelling down the open roads of Hawkins, she felt the rhythm take over her soul. It was her escape. Her home on Old Cherry Road wasn't safe. She had known that the minute Neil and his booming voice entered the picture. She'd managed to make Billy afraid of her, but he still sided with his father, he was way more petrifying. She understood that, she knew her place.

Her place in the party was defined. She was the zoomer. When her and Lucas broke up, it only made them closer, as it was the first time she'd truly been vulnerable. And she became closer to all the other members. Will and her bonded over quiet evenings in Castle Byers, Dustin and her had a friendly competition over who is better at Dig Dug. Even Eleven, who had hated her. There was only one unknown. Michael Wheeler. He always seemed to be annoyed at her when around the others, but when they were in English, the only class they had with just them, he seemed different. He always seemed to be thinking in it. God knows what. But he looked at her curiously occasionally, as if he needed to tell her something. They both would talk about whatever they were currently studying, or the newest campaign. Max actually enjoyed helping him write them, and it turns out together they made a great pair for writing.

And then one day, when they had English last, he asked her if she wanted to come over after school. It took her a minute for her brain to process what he had said, but she accepted his invite. They walked to his house that February afternoon, and mostly discussed how bullshit their teacher was for setting them an essay for homework. They were riled up, in a good way, and both enjoyed having the freedom of complaining. But then suddenly Mike stopped joking around.
"I need to talk to you about something."

“The new campaign?”
“No. Something important.”
She was a little nervous, but let him carry on.
“I think there’s something wrong with me.”
“Mike, you may be a bitch sometimes but there isn’t anything wrong with you.”
“No it’s not that, and thanks, love the compliment. This is about something else.”
“Carry on…” Max said uneasily. She hoped it wasn’t another Mind Flayer.
“You know how I liked El?”
“Yeah you didn’t shut up about her.”
“Well.”
He paused for a minute. She could tell whatever he was going to say next he hasn’t told anyone else.
“I think I like Will.”
“Oh.”
“I don’t really care if you hate me, you probably do anyway. But what I think is wrong is that I know I like girls. But I also like him. And I like guys too. Is that even a thing?”
“Well I don’t hate you. And you don’t really see people who like guys and girls. But I don’t think it’s wrong. I mean at least you have the option of girls. I mean I do too.”
“Wait. What? You like both?”
Shit. What had she just said. She can’t really take it back now.
“Well. No. I kinda just like girls. Which is shit.”
“What about Lucas?”
“Why do you think we broke up?”
“Oh.”
“It’s even more shit because Neil knows and hates me for it.”
“Damn Max, I am sorry.”
“Don’t be. You’re going to hate me too, if you don’t already.”
“Why? I don’t actually hate you, I just think you’re annoying.”
“The feeling’s mutual. But I kinda like Jane.”
Shit.
She hadn’t really talked about her feelings for the brunette girl before, but damn. That girl was perfect. She was hurt at first by how cold she was to her, but once they had gotten closer, damn she was every star in the universe. She loved watching her curls of hair bob up and down when she moved. Max also loved how Eleven would

become entranced by books, movies, music, anything. It was beautiful. She also thought it was magical how she talked. Her voice put everything else to shame. It was melodic and hypnotic, it was from the heavens above. She hadn't really talked about any of these thoughts before though, as she shouldn't like girls. It was wrong after all. And she had to stay tough, as her thoughts were out of character for her.
"Okay." She could tell he didn't know what to say. "I get it. She's brilliant."
"Yeah. I know it's weird I like your ex and all, but believe me I have no chance with her."
"You could. El's sweet, plus she likes you as a friend a lot already. It's not impossible."
"Well if you manage to get El to be my girlfriend, I will get Will to be your boyfriend ."
"Challenge accepted."

English was a lot more fun from then on. And all the other time Max and Mike spent together. In English they'd talk about El and Will, and they would only squabble jokingly the rest of the time. And Max spent a lot of time with Eleven, and Will too. With El, they'd have sleepovers and she wouldn't trade it for the world. With Will, they'd relax in Castle Byers. One day, she told him she liked girls. He was the sweetest person she knew, well apart from El, so she knew he'd understand. What she didn't expect was his reply.
"That's great, I like boys."
"You do?"
"Yeah."
"Any boy in particular?"
Please say Mike. Please say Mike.
"Does Marty McFly count?"
Damn. After Mike had told her about his crush, she'd been secretly noticing how often he would stare at him. And she was really rooting for them to get together. She didn't really get why the Party thought it was Will with the crush. They must be oblivious to see it's Mike.
"Do you have your eye on any girls?"
"Well uh… Eleven actually."
"Really? Damn." His smile suggested he found it funny, and she was annoyed.
"Dude don't laugh!"

“It’s just funny. She always looks as if she feels the same way.”
“Wait really? Well how would you feel if I told you a boy likes you?”
Will was taken aback by the honest tone in her voice, she could tell.
“Who?”
“Well you’ll just have to find out. You know them pretty well.”
“Tell me!”
“Nope.”
“Max!”
She found this fun. This might also make him finally pick up on Mike’s obvious crush, so she was pleased.
“Just finish your drawing.”
“I don’t believe you, you know.”
“You’ll see I’m right.”

The next week at school was interesting. She told Lucas about how she ‘thought’ Mike liked Will. He agreed with her and they’d both laugh when they saw Mike gazing at Will. The rest of the Party would get confused, but it confused Will the most. But then she also saw Will nudging Dustin whenever she’d caught herself staring at El.
“I’m telling you, you seriously can’t get El to like me.”
“Trust me, I will. Question, have you spoken to Will about anything to do with me?”
“Not directly…” She said with a smirk. “He likes boys too you know.” She whispered.
“Really? Wait what do you mean by not directly?”
“I may have said a guy he knew liked him. Didn’t say it was you though!”
“Max! He’s been catching me staring at him!”
“Well, has he got annoyed about it?”
“No… He’s smiled about it. What if he figured it out?”
“Mike, Will is the most oblivious person I know. Even if he did notice, he wouldn’t have put two and two together.”
“Still!”
“Can’t we talk about the new campaign?”
“Fine.”

It was also fun having Will bug her about the mysterious person with a crush on him. And she was right about him not putting two and two together, of all the random names he guessed, Mike was never one of them. He’d guessed Dustin and Lucas, so she wasn’t sure why

he hadn't guessed his best friend. Watching his eyes dart around the room whenever Lucas and Max laughed about seeing Mike stare intently at him, it was the most entertaining thing. It almost made her forget about her huge crush on El. Like she even had a shot with her.

Well she had thought that up until their sleepover that Saturday.

El had been acting different, to say the least. She had a lot on her mind, obviously. So Max had asked her what was up.
"I have something I need to tell you."
"What is it El?"
Max was worried because El was nervous.
"I… I like you."

Max's heart had stopped right there. Her brain went fuzzy yet she felt so happy. She couldn't actually believe what was going on. Maybe El meant it as a friend. No. She wouldn't have said it like that if she did. She needed clarification though, as the girl didn't always understanding what she was saying.
"Not just as a friend?"
"No, like how I liked Mike."
"Really?"
"Yeah. Please don't hate me please!"
"El I'd never hate you. I... like you too."
"You do?"
El's face was beaming and Max's heart was bursting. It felt like a dream.
"Max why are you pinching yourself? Don't hurt yourself!"
She hadn't even noticed she was doing it.
"El, do you want to be my girlfriend?"
Her answer was unexpected. It was the most blissful moment in her life. Time had stopped. It felt like petals of beautiful flowers were falling from the sky, and everything around her was gone. Her heart was melting, her body was tingling all over. She was in love in that moment.

El had kissed her.

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy pride month everyone! I hope you enjoy this chapter, it took a while to write. Sorry I haven't updated in a while, I might not be able to update for a while again as I have end of year exams coming up! But I hope you enjoy it. Please leave feedback in the comments!

8. say that you need me

Mike Wheeler was a complex being. But one thing he thought was pretty simple was that he liked boys and girls. He couldn't explain it, he just knew. And when he first thought about it, he did have initial confusion. Was it real? Was there something wrong with him? Why did it have to be him? These questions were soon answered.

One of Mike's favourite memories was meeting Will Byers, his best friend. He still regards befriending him as the best thing he'd ever done. And Will wasn't just his best friend. He was the best. It was unfair that anything bad should ever happen to him, yet it did anyway. Will was quiet when he was younger, but as he grew he became more bubbly around his friends. It was exhilarating seeing this side of him. But it got ripped out of him by the demogorgon and mind flayer. It was all of the soul sucked out of the most angelic and harmless person in the world. Mike hated this. He didn't know why, but he needed to put all his energy in getting his Will back. Not that damn mind flayer's. His.

Of course he knew Will would never be the same, and he couldn't blame him for this. In a way, Mike liked seeing Will as he was when they wore clothes about ten sizes too big. It made him want to care for him even more than previous to 1983. But luckily for him, he didn't need to. Will, well he seemed to have figured out something that he didn't know before. Mike could tell. And then suddenly, very recently, Will had become a lot lighter. As if whatever he had figured out was no longer worrying him. Mike didn't know what it was, and didn't want to push Will's boundaries, but he was glad he was happier.

The first time he'd noticed any feelings for Will was when he and El had broke up. Well not exactly, about a month after. He'd noticed how happy he felt when Will came into the room. Like when he'd beat Max in Donkey Kong, but a million times better. He'd noticed how pretty Will was. He'd entertain himself with the idea of Will cuddling into him and smiling at him and as they would fondly gaze at each other, Will would lean upwards and- Mike would dismiss the thought as platonic. And he did that for a few months. Various

daydreams of him destroying the mind flayer and rescuing him would play out in his mind. But he would never let them get to the end; not until he realised it wasn't normal to not just appreciate but fascinate himself with even the smallest things like Will's eyelashes. How they'd gently glide against each other when he blinked. Mike realised after months of obliviousness he clearly liked the boy romantically. At first this confused him, as he thought he was supposed to like girls. And he knew he did, he had loved El. So why Will? Was it even possible?

English was the only lesson he really enjoyed. Mike was naturally a writer, although his parents hated it. Not sustainable, they'd tell him, even though they'd never read a thing he wrote. Words came to him like flowers in spring, and he relished in the fact. He loved writing campaigns, and decided to let Max, the only other party member in that class, collaborate on them. Obviously they had their rivalry, but it was one of his favourite times of the day. He couldn't let her know that, obviously. But he knew, of all the party members, he valued her opinion of him the least, so he took it as an opportunity to see if liking both boys and girls was actually a thing. An invite to his house was the start, and they walked to his house together, casually strolling down the street. They complained, because of course they did, but he knew he had to talk before reaching his house.
"I need to talk to you about something." He immediately felt his throat close up.
"The new campaign?"
"No. Something important." He was a little nervous, but carried on. "I think there's something wrong with me."
"Mike, you may be a bitch sometimes but there isn't anything wrong with you." He definitely didn't care about her opinion.
"No it's not that, and thanks, love the compliment. This is about something else."
"Carry on…" She was clearly hesitant.
"You know how I liked El?"
"Yeah you didn't shut up about her." Wow, was he really that lovesick?
"Well."
He can't do this.
He has to do this.
"I think I like Will."

“Oh.”
Oh. He has to keep going. He doesn’t care about her opinion. Actually, he does. He won’t say that though.
“I don’t really care if you hate me, you probably do anyway. But what I think is wrong is that I know I like girls. But I also like him. And I like guys too. Is that even a thing?”
“Well I don’t hate you.”
Thank god.
“And you don’t really see people who like guys and girls. But I don’t think it’s wrong. I mean at least you have the option of girls. I mean I do too.”
What? Max likes both too?
“Wait. What? You like both?”
“Well. No. I kinda just like girls. Which is shit.”
Oh. At least he can still relate?
“What about Lucas?”
“Why do you think we broke up?”
“Oh.”
“It’s even more shit because Neil knows and hates me for it.”
Mike didn’t even realise what her dick of a father would think. The guy is very similar to Ted in that sense, but Mike’s father doesn’t have a clue about him, as luck would have it.
“Damn Max, I am sorry.”
“Don’t be. You’re going to hate me too, if you don’t already.”
“Why? I don’t actually hate you, I just think you’re annoying.”
“The feeling’s mutual. But I kinda like Jane.”
Mike can’t really hate her for it. He’s been there too. The magical girl with magical powers. She’s not completely unattainable though, El hasn’t been raised on the idea that she has to love a guy.
“Okay. I get it. She’s brilliant.”
“Yeah. I know it’s weird I like your ex and all, but believe me I have no chance with her.”
“You could. El’s sweet, plus she likes you as a friend a lot already. It’s not impossible.”
“Well if you manage to get El to be my girlfriend, I will get Will to be your boyfriend.”
“Challenge accepted.”
And that was the first time he’d ever told anyone he liked guys and girls. And he wouldn’t change it at all.

So he knew he wanted to get El to like Max. He just didn't know how. And clearly, something had happened between the rest of the party, minus El, because there was a lot of giggling and nudging. It was if they were all 13 again, and it was crazy. Glancing at Will for even a second would earn him a round of laughter from Max and Lucas- did she tell him?- and when she would rest her eyes on the brunette girl, Will and Dustin seemed to silently comment. It was all very confusing, and a lot more worrying. Taking in how wonderful Will's hair was dangerous, as he kept catching him ogling him. Will didn't really seem too put off by it though, but he wouldn't dare too many times. He confronted Max about it, and she explained the situation being him knowing someone liked him, specifically a guy, but not who. He knew he had to get her back. So he went to the girl in love with the world.

"El?"
Sat down in her recently cleaned cabin, the boy started a conversation with the girl invested in her encyclopedia. The day was nice, for late winter.
"What is it Mike?"
"Do you like anyone?" He went straight in for the kill.
"Uh… yes." She was anticipating his next move.
"I like Will." He knew it would happen anyway, and clearly she'd be more likely to elaborate on her feelings if he shared his. And at this point he didn't really care anyway.
"You do?" She eyed him cautiously.
"Yeah."
"I… I like Max."
Mike was overjoyed at the news. He'd picked up on it definitely, but hearing her say it was great. He wanted his partner in creating so many fantastic universes to be happy, and this was perfect news.
"Tell her."
El was clearly taken aback.
"But Hopper said some people don't like it. I don't want Max to not like me!"
"Trust me, she'll like you more if you do."
Seeing El's face light up was more than what Mike could have asked for, and he was excited to see them finally get together. Yes, he may have been a bit bitter, but he really liked Will.

Max's smile on the next Monday was priceless. She was in heaven, clearly. And Lucas saw it too. The sweet loving smiles shared between the girls didn't go unnoticed by the male party members, everyone seemed very happy for the girls. And it went unspoken that they were together, the hand holding and protecting arms around each other were more telling than any word could convey. However, Will remained constantly on the lookout for any potential people who liked him. Mike was very uneasy about this, as he didn't know how Will would react if he knew it was him.

Yet Will seemed extremely interested in the lanky boy, and kept trying to spend as much time with him as possible. Mike had no clue what had provoked this urge to spend time together, but he took this as a good thing. Constant one-on-one invitations to the local cafe, library, arcade, you name it were what Mike experienced. He couldn't help but hope Will liked him, although he didn't believe this was possible. It was clear, however, Will had spoken to Max, and was impatient to know who his secret admirer was. Dying to know who the mysterious guy was.

He wasn't that mysterious, unfortunately. Mike made sure he wasn't too obvious about his feelings, but also had an unknown want to tell Will. They were in the museum, and Will was making a remark about the beauty of a piece of art. Mike thought he was the beauty of all the art in the world combined, and almost told him this. The way Will's eyes darted around, taking in every aspect of the museum, was a spectacle. And Mike loved every second.

It was a Sunday morning in early spring. Mike was preparing to meet up with Will, and he knew exactly what he was going to do. Mike knew Will had to be told how inspiring, radiant and angelic he was. He decided to let go of whatever was holding him back, heck, Will probably already knew. He was meeting him at their favourite hang out of late, a diner on the other side of town. The blue tones of the walls made the room have a calm quality, and it often played smooth jazz. Despite all this, Mike couldn't help but feel anxious. Will may hate him. He desperately needed this not to be this case.

The song Crazy For You by Madonna was playing when Will entered the diner. The boy was handsome, and clearly had grown well over the past years. No longer the small boy who was bullied and tortured.

Joining Mike in the booth, he looked happy. Mike, on the other hand, was tense. He was obsessing over every little detail of the way he looked, making sure no hair was out of place. He didn't know how to start. Yet he did, in the most ungraceful, yet most Mike way.

"Hey Will."
"Hey."
"So. I uh… I like you."

Mike's heart stopped.

9. love me love me, say that you love me

Will set off for their recent hang out, a diner refurbished from the 50s. Will thought it was a perfect place to draw in, and often found himself drawing the building itself. Mike used the time to write new campaigns for the party. A few times Will had drawn Mike, focused on creating new adventures for the party to explore. He always appeared to be lost in thought, which Will wanted to be able to capture perfectly in his art. Mike was his favourite member of the party for this reason.

But recently the party's dynamics had changed. Mostly because of El and Max getting together, but there was clearly other things too. Yes they may be constantly complimenting each other; blushing when the other enters the room; braiding each other's hair, but Will didn't think it was that causing the shift. He thought it would be Max and Lucas clearly seeming to have some inside joke about something he's too slow to pick up on. Mike seemed to notice it too. But that was just Will's observation. Max told him a very interesting thing when he told her he was gay. That there was another gay guy, but not just that, one who likes him! Will thought it was probably whatever god there may be trying to make up for all of the previous events in his life.

Ever since the Mind Flayer, Will had been on edge. Every flicker of a light, every grey cloud that dared enter the sky would keep him paranoid. The doctors told him this was completely normal, but he still hated it. However, when he entered high school he didn't want to keep having everyone to treat him like he was going to break. So he put on a brave face, like everyone always told him he had for surviving the upside down, and tried becoming more than just the box with a fragile label on. He also hated his mom being so worried, and always tried to comfort her. Although Hopper seemed to be good at that already. But Will tried to put his effort into getting better, so he could remain useful to the party. Yet he really only felt truly better very recently. Telling Dustin, his Mom, El and then Max that he was gay was liberating. He didn't think he had to tell the other party members, they probably already knew, and he knew his mom told Hopper. So all in all, he was fine for once. All of the stones in his

sack had grown lighter, and not just because he'd grown stronger.

As he crossed the road, he pondered why Mike wanted to see him so urgently. That morning, he woke up to Mike's voice telling him "Wake up asshole, meet me at the diner at 2." Something about Mike's tone suggested impulsivity, yet queasiness at the same time. Which in turn, made Will think something was off. He wondered if Mike knew who that mystery guy is, he probably has more of a clue than Will. Will's first thought may have been Lucas, due to him and Max spending a lot of time together and having in jokes about goodness knows what. But his mind was immediately changed when he saw him longingly staring at every girl in gym class. Plus he just couldn't see it. He knew it wasn't Dustin from the get-go, as he'd specifically told him he wasn't interested in men. So he didn't have a clue who it could be. He didn't know that many guys, especially not ones that Max also knew.

Unless…

Will had just pieced it together. Although he couldn't quite believe it. He'd found himself stopped in his tracks, outside of a park full to the brim with children emitting happiness. He honestly was so annoyed at himself for not realising it sooner. The guy is Mike. The. Guy. Is. Mike. He is literally the only other guy him and Max are friends with. Will suddenly realised all the obvious evidence to why it would be Mike. Sometimes in class he'd glance at Mike to find him already looking at him and being startled at Will's return in eye contact. It was quite cute if he was being honest. But that was when Lucas and Max would start laughing! It all suddenly joined together. And today, well it's most likely about Mike liking him. There was a sliver of doubt in Will's mind but he ignored it. Thinking about Mike liking him brought on a wave of emotions that used to be in the background of his life. Will hadn't really thought about liking a guy in particular, more because he was worried what people would think. And he'd put so much energy into becoming stronger, he hadn't fully thought about it.

If Mike does like him, damn Will's lucky. Mike is very handsome, and now that he's thinking about him, he's not fully felt this before. The darker haired boy was a work of art in Will's eyes, but as he walks past the 100th tree on his journey, the thought of him brings a new

sensation of happiness and butterflies. He'd always known Mike was the epitome of his perfect guy, although he'd always put the fact he's his friend and highly unattainable first. As he walks past flowers dancing in the mild wind, his mind races with thoughts of Mike. Why hadn't he let himself like Mike like this before? It was one of the most exceptional feelings Will had ever felt. The blood running its course around his body had picked up the pace and he was loving it. Mike was one of the most amiable and affectionate people he'd ever met- he was glad he was finally putting the words El had taught him to use. Although no words could describe how purely fantastic Mike was. Everything had clicked into place in his mind. Will skipped along the street just thinking about Mike.

As Will turned the corner, he realised he'd reached his destination. He was excited to see Mike now. As he entered the calmly lit diner, he scanned the room for his friend. When the tufts of dark hair appeared, he made his way towards them. Locking eyes with the boy, he slid in the booth and smiled. He sensed Mike was nervous, but he didn't want him to be. He was obsessing over every little detail of the way he looked, although Will thought he looked extraordinary the way he was.
Mike started the conversation.
"Hey Will."
"Hey." He responded, not sure what to say next. Although the boy sat across from him did.
"So. I uh… I like you."
Mike clearly was surprised at what he'd just said, and Will didn't realise he'd be so quick with it. In a way, he preferred it. But everything inside him exploded. How he was going to react is a completely different topic.
Will had no idea how to respond. Does he say he likes him too? Does he say okay? No. He will not just say okay.
"Okay."
He had to say okay. He had to fix his response. He had to keep cool. Inside, he was definitely not cool. He wanted to shout how beautiful he looks right now, or how he finds it adorable when he is invested in a story or how his speech about the day they met was the only thing motivating him for a very long time. But he said okay. Wow Will.
"I like you too, by the way, but I already figured out you liked me on

the way here."
Mike looked like he had a lot of emotions. Will had a lot of emotions. His heart was slowly turning into fireworks and he'd never came across that emotion before.
"Wow. I didn't actually expect that."
"I don't think I did either."
"Do you want to be my… boyfriend?" Mike hesitantly asked.
"Does Dustin love chocolate pudding?"
Will's heart had melted. He never believed he'd get a high school boyfriend, let alone the most beautiful person internally and externally that he'd met. He didn't know where to go from there, so he let his melted heart run him.
"Did you know you have the most perfect lips?" Why did he let his heart run him? Mike was smiling, and he probably looked shocked at what he just said.
"Will, you flatter me. But you have more perfect lips."
"But with yours they're just so nice and kissable and detailed- amazing to draw by the way. They are the perfect shape and they smile so nicely that it makes me so happy." He honestly didn't know which tree he got his sap from, but it was making Mike happy so he just let his heart go on a tangent.
"Kissable?" Mike was smirking, of course he picked up on the kissable.
"Yeah, maybe?"
"Maybe? Well if my lips are so kissable, kiss me." Holy shit. There isn't anyone who could have a view of him kissing Mike. But how does he even kiss? He's never kissed!
"How do I even kiss you? You know I'm inexperienced."
"You're probably amazing!"
"Shut up Wheeler-"
And here is where all time stopped. His heart had left for a permanent vacation in fireworktown and his stomach in the butterfly enclosure at the zoo. Mike had kissed him, and it was heavenly. His lips felt perfect against his own and make him feel all tingly inside. Will's credits had rolled and it was his perfect movie moment. He relished in every second of it, it was the best thing he'd ever experienced. When Mike pulled away, Will pulled him back in again. He was not letting this go. He could feel Mike smiling in the few seconds between kisses, and when they fully pulled apart both of them had stunned, and giddy expressions.

“Will… That was amazing.”

Will spent most of that night thinking about Mike. Damn Mike and his stupidly good kissing. Unsure of what would happen next, Will hoped for the best. He didn’t really know what to make of his newly found feelings for the one person who he felt closest to. He never really thanked Mike for staying with him during the Shadow Monster days. It was the only thing keeping him in reality. Knowing Mike was there to protect him when he was so scared. He was truly the most enchanting person. He made him feel so safe, like it was only them, and that was all that mattered. Something had always been in him constantly thinking about Mike. He gave him strength. But Will had only recognised it that day. And he wished he’d realised it earlier.

The next day was bliss. He constantly felt blushes creep across his face whenever Mike even glanced at him. It was the most exhilarating rush even brushing his skin against Mike’s. Mike appeared to feel the same way too. His heart was a field of flowers and Mike was picking every single petal. Cheeky glances from Dustin made him process that he’d figured out that something was blooming between him and Mike. Max and El seemed to know too, but were too invested in holding each other’s hand and being as close to each other as physically possible. And Lucas’ supportive smile implied he knew too. Everything about it was perfect. Will’s happy ending.

Walking side by side with his new boyfriend at lunch, they were about to turn a corner when they spotted Max and El chatting privately.
“What do you think they’re talking about?” Mike whispered.
“Either girl stuff or each other.”
“Max, can you take me to California one day?” El pleaded while the ginger haired girl smiled, trying to take in every detail of the girl’s face.
“Of course I will, we can ride off into the sunset on my skateboard like every cliche in every film.”
“I’d love that like I love you.” Max was just as surprised as the two boys listening in.
“Holy crap!” Will whisper-exclaimed to Mike.
“I can’t believe she just said that!” He responded in a hushed voice.
“I love you too El, I love how your eyes widen with excitement when

you turn a page on a book, or when you smile when you see Will's dog. It may be cheesy as shit but you are adorable Hopper." The girls were now leaning into kiss each other, full of pure love for each other.
"Why can't we be sappy like that!" Mike whined, which Will found endearing and very cute.
"We can, see I think every detail of your face deserves it's own museum, book and film dedicated to it." Mike's face lit up, and seemed pleased.
"You are like a show of spectacular fireworks when you smile Byers. Also, you are like a puppy."
Will burst out laughing at Mike's odd remark.
"A puppy? Sorry… but I don't see my tail."
"No I mean you are cute and sweet and I will never let anything ever hurt you. I need you."
The tempo of Will's heartbeat sped up. His heart was screaming 'KISS!'.
"As long as I'm with you I feel pretty much invincible." Although not as amazing of a response, Mike was smiling, so Will was smiling.
'KISS!'

And then Mike leaned in.
'KISS!'

He could feel Mike's heated breath on him.
'KISS!'

"Date on Friday?" Mike suggested, to Will's surprise.
"Of course."
'KISS!'

And Will sealed his reply with a kiss.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Thank you all for all of your lovely comments on this! I am so happy to finally finish! I hope you all liked the ending! This was my first fanfic, and I'm proud of how the story has evolved. I have no clue whether or not to do a sequel, so tell me if you'd want to see that! I am hopefully going to write more

fanfics soon, I have a few ideas for new ones, I might do one over the course of the summer! But again, thank you all for being so nice and supporting the story!